

first draft

Communion I: Remember Me
II Cor. 11:17-24

"The Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed took bread..." That is where we usually begin our Scriptural introduction to the Lord's Supper, ^{and} It is a good place to begin. It is liturgically proper and considerably more pious than the way Paul the missionary handled it in his letter to the Corinthians.

Sentimental feeling as usual *and with* ~~Piety has its place at the Lord's Table, But sometimes we could do with less~~ ~~could do with~~ more of Paul's honest, Biblical bluntness. Let me back up a paragraph and look at what Paul said before he began to talk about the breaking of bread and the drinking of the wine. ~~Forgive me for I have to condense~~ condensing and paraphrasing, but what he wrote goes something like this:

Paraphrase:- "I am not commending you, for when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. In the first place, I hear that there are divisions among you. And some of you come drunk, and others go away hungry because you don't share your food with them. Then this is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." (II Cor. 11:17-22)

In other words ~~What that says to us is this: when in our lives as Christians we separate from each other, and pamper ourselves and humiliate the poor, - this is not the Lord's Supper. It is a profaning of the body and blood of Christ.~~ *If you are here, still*

Now not many of us in Miller Chapel come drunk, and not many of us consciously discriminate against the poor, though ~~coming from the outside as I did fairly recently,~~ I have the impression that most Americans are in more danger than we like to admit of both those sins.

Nevertheless, it is not our sins about which the Supper centers. Unrepented sin is an obstacle at the Supper. Paul made that very clear. But so is a guilty, continuing obsession with self-judgment, as he also notes in the same passage. We are judged by the Lord, he says, not by ourselves, and when we are judged by the Lord, "we are chastened so that we may not be condemned..". (11:32)

Nor do we come here to denounce the sins of others--those drunks, those guilty rich, those oppressors ~~against whom so much of our preaching ministry is directed.~~ Self-righteous indignation can be a sin, too, and is as false a focus to the Supper as any other sin.

say and ~~The why come to the table, if not to forgive and be forgiven? seems odd in way~~ ~~The heart of the passage tells us why.~~ We come to remember. "This do in remembrance.." ~~And what we are to remember is not our sins, and not the sins of others against us. We are to remember his saving offering up of Himself for sin. We are to remember Jesus. "This do in remembrance of me."~~

My mind goes back to the most moving communion service I have ever been in. It was not long after I had returned to Korea in 1955, just after the Korea War. It was in a little village just down the Han River below Seoul, at a point where the United Nations forces that stormed ashore in the Inchon landings had to cross the river in order to free the capital. It was held by North Korean communists; it had to be taken. So the big guns were wheeled into place. I am told that if a whole battery of guns is trained on a target and fired simultaneously by a timed mechanism, the percussive effect is much greater than when the same number of shells are dropped one by one on a target. And this is

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how they had to take Haengju, that little village. The heavy guns were swung around in grim unison, and the electrical timers pushed off the shells in one great blinding blast that virtually wiped the little village off the hill. There had been 70 Christian homes in that village. 67 of them were completely destroyed.

Now, only two years after the end of the war, I, another American had come there to celebrate communion. I thought of the memories that must be racing through their minds, as I watched the Christians in that little church prepare for the communion service. There was an intensity of feeling in the room which I had not felt in communion services across the Pacific. Some were weeping openly. For their dead, I thought, and their lost homes. I wondered if some might secretly be resentful of the presence of an American. American guns had destroyed them.

It was not so at all, I found out. There was no bitterness in their hearts at all. They had been freed. And it was not the memory of their own suffering and destruction and death that moved them so. They were doing precisely what this text of ours commands, what Jesus asked. They were remembering, yes--but remembering Him. The meaning of the sacrament is not in the remembering, and not even in the elements, but in Jesus Christ. And they were remembering not how they had suffered, but how Jesus had suffered for them. And in that remembering, they had found peace and purpose, even as they wept. To the Christians of Haengju, communion meant neither sorrow for sin, though that is part of it, nor possession of forgiveness, though the joy of forgiveness is part of it. After every communion service, their practice was to go out and tell others what Jesus had done for them on His cross. To them, communion issues in witness. Come then, and taste and tell.

COMMUNION

I Cor. 11:24 "This do in remembrance of me"

As we come together for communion and ask ourselves "What does it mean?" my mind goes back to the first communion I celebrated on my return to Korea in 1953.

I. It was in Haengju.

As I watched the intensity of their participation - some were weeping - it suddenly struck me that it was not the meaning of ^{men suffering} destruction and death that moved them so. They were doing precisely what their Lord & ours commands, what Jesus asked. They were remembering, yes - but remembering ^{and obeying} Him - "This do in remembrance of me". The meaning of the sacrament is not in the remembering, but in Jesus' ^{and obeying} it. This do in remembrance of me. They remembered, not what they had forgotten, but what Jesus suffered for them: -

II. But more than act of memory, an act of will. "This do" Jesus said nothing about what the elements do... Concerned about what ^{we} do. This takes me back to my last communion in China.

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"The Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed took bread..." That is where we usually begin our Scriptural introduction to the Lord's Supper, and it is a good place to begin. It is ^{proper} liturgically ^{proper}. And it's considerably more pious than the way Paul the missionary handled it in his letter to the Corinthians.

^{But} Sometimes we could do with less sentimental piety and more honest, Pauline bluntness at communion. Back up a paragraph and look at what Paul wrote before he began to talk about the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine. I will have to condense and paraphrase:

".. when you come together for this Supper," he says "it is not for the better but for the worse. In the first place, I hear that there are divisions among you. And some of you come drunk, and others go away hungry because you don't share your food with them. When you act like that, then this is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. It is a profaning of the body and blood of Christ." (II Cor. 11:17-22). ^{Drinking, drunkenness, & so on. I suppose it's in the Corinthian. Paul is pretty blunt.}

^{Now} Not many of us in Miller Chapel come drunk, and not many of us consciously discriminate against the poor. But there are divisions among us. And we have our self-indulgences. And most Americans are more humiliatingly indifferent to the poor than we like to admit.

Nevertheless, it is not our sins about which the Supper centers. We don't judge ourselves, Paul says in this same passage, the Lord judges and when he judges he chastens "so that we may not be condemned". (I Cor. 11:32) ^{serve it to him. so. & that's what he's saying.}

Nor do we come here to denounce the sins of others--those drunks, those guilty rich, those oppressors. Self-righteous indignation is a sin, too, and as false a focus to the Supper as any other sin.

Then what is the focus here. Why come to the table, if not to forgive and be forgiven? Jesus told us why. We come to remember. "This do in remembrance.." And what we are to remember is not our sins, and not the sins of others against us. We are to remember Jesus. "This do in remembrance of me."

My mind goes back to the most moving communion service I have ever been in. It was not long after I had returned to Korea in 1955, just after the Korea War. It was in a little village down the Han River below Seoul, at a point where the United Nations forces that stormed ashore in the Inchon landings had to cross the river in order to reach the capital. It was held by North Korean communists; it had to be taken. So the big guns were wheeled into place. I am told that if a whole battery of guns is trained on a target and fired simultaneously by a timed mechanism, the percussive effect is much greater than when the same number of shells are dropped one by one on a target. And this is how they had to take Haengju, that little village. The heavy guns were swung around in grim unison, and the electrical timers pushed off the shells in one great blinding blast that virtually wiped the little village off the hill. There had been 70 Christian homes there. 67 of them were completely destroyed.

Now, only two years after the end of the war, another American had come there to celebrate communion. I thought of the memories that must be racing through their minds. There was an intensity of feeling in the room which I had not felt in communion services back here. Some were weeping openly. For their dead, I thought, and their lost homes. I wondered if some might secretly be resentful of the presence of an American. American guns had destroyed them.

But I found no bitterness in their hearts at all. And it was not the memory of their own suffering and destruction and death that moved them so. They were doing precisely what this text of ours commands, what Jesus asked. They were remembering--not how they had suffered, nor who had made them suffer, but how Jesus had suffered for them. And in that remembering, they found peace and purpose, even as they wept. To the Christians of Haengju, communion meant neither sorrow for sin, though that is part of it, nor possession of forgiveness, though that, too, is part of it. After every communion service, their practice was to go out and tell others what they remembered. How Jesus had died for them on the cross. The Lord's Supper is first for remembering, and then for a witness. So come and taste, and go and tell. "This do in remembrance of me".

For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink the cup
ye do show forth the death of the Lord Jesus

If you don't care. If you are not sorry — then again that blind Apostle Paul might well say — This isn't the Lord's Supper you are eating.

One of the orders for our Presbyterian service begins "All who are truly sorry for their sins and would be delivered from the burden of them are invited and encouraged to come to this Sacrament." There is a place for self-examination and repentance at the Lord's Supper.

John Jensen in his little book Words of God says we must always ask ourselves the question of the disciples at the first Lord's Supper, "Lord, is it I?" "Which of you will betray me," the Lord asks; and each disciple, suddenly anxious asks, "Lord, is it I?" No one of us can be quite sure. "In John's account," says Dr. Jensen, "Jesus rises from the table and began to wash the disciple's feet, saying 'You are clean, but not all of you.' And in his play The King's Supper, Dorothy Sayers has Peter whisper to John, 'John, why does he say we are not all clean?' and John whispers back, 'I don't know, Peter, but when I look into my heart I find it full of unswept, dusty corners.' " There is indeed a place for repentance at the Lord's Supper.

Nevertheless — go in —